

## Guilt of the Innocent

Will Redman paid the driver and watched the taxi leave the car park. He'd hoped to slip in unnoticed at the last moment but had miscalculated how long the journey would take. It had been a snap decision to come here today and already he was regretting it. He looked at the people traipsing across the car park – all strangers to him now.

Voices fell silent as the funeral procession arrived. Will strode the few steps to the building and joined the end of the line of mourners. All the seats were taken so he stood behind the back row. But he wasn't the last to arrive. A well-dressed blonde woman ran through the doors just as they were closing and stood at his side. They acknowledged each other with a nod and joined in the singing of the first hymn, sharing the order of service that Will had been given as he came in.

After so long away, Will's mind started to wander. Thirty two years; no wonder he didn't recognise any of the people here. He hoped they wouldn't recognise him either.

"I'm Clare," said the woman who had been standing beside him as they emerged into the fresh air. "Thank you for letting me share your hymn sheet."

"No worries," he muttered. There was an awkward pause. "My name's Will." He hadn't intended to tell her his name but it felt rude not to. He certainly didn't intend to divulge any other information.

"Are you going to the wake?" asked Clare.

"No. I've no transport."

"No problem. I'll give you a lift."

"No need. Thank you all the same." The last thing Will wanted was having to converse with people from his past, people who might still bear him a grudge.

"Please come," Clare pleaded. "I won't know anyone there and it's important that I go. I'd be very grateful for your company. My car's just over there." She pointed to a tiny white Fiat parked in a space marked 'staff only'.

"Do you work here?" he asked.

"No." Clare laughed. "It was the only vacant space when I arrived – late as usual!"

"Why is it so important for you to go to the wake if you don't know people?" Will asked as they approached the car.

"I'm a journalist," said Clare. "I'm writing a piece on how the Sherwood and Dukeries area has changed since the pits closed. I wanted to interview Jim Breedon but he was too ill and then, when he died, I thought I'd come and pay my respects. Jim had quite a following amongst the striking miners in 1984."

Will said nothing. Another awkward silence.

"How did you know him?" Clare persisted.

Will gave a deep sigh. He really didn't want to say any more.

Clare glanced across at him.

"Jim Breedon was my uncle."

"That's a bit of a let-down. I was expecting something much more sinister than that," said Clare. "So was there some history between you and Jim; did you not get on?"

Will cringed inwardly. Were all journalists this nosy or was Clare exceptionally inquisitive?

"I'm not going to tell you anything that you can put in a story," he said firmly.

"Fair enough. Off the record then." She hoped Will wouldn't notice that she'd crossed her fingers as she was speaking.

"Do you remember the miners' strike in 1984?" Will asked.

"Vaguely. My dad was one of the managers in the pits at that time."

"Well you'd better keep that to yourself when we get to the wake," said Will. "Jim and his son were on strike, as I suspect were most of the people who'll be there."

"Were you?" asked Clare.

"No. Nor was me dad," he said, slipping into the local dialect as he thought back in time.

"Is that why you didn't want to come to the wake?"

He shrugged. "Loyalties and grievances last a long time in pit communities. If anyone recognises me things could get nasty."

"How long is it since you were here?" Clare asked.

"I left in December 1984 after a blazing row with Jim."

"About not striking?"

"Yes. Dad wouldn't strike. He stuck it out – carried on working despite all the aggro. I'd told him I were going to join the strike and he were gutted. Felt I'd betrayed him. I felt terrible. Any road, seeing Uncle Jim and me dad – his own brother-in-law – arguing like that just pushed me over the edge. I packed me things and left that night. And I've never been back."

"Do you realise your local accent's come back, Will? I thought you were an Aussie when I first met you but now you're talking just like a local."

"I am a local. And proud of it." Will paused. "Although I'm not proud of running away to Australia when the going got tough."

"How old were you?"

"Eighteen."

"Couldn't handle the pressure, I suppose. No-one could blame you for that," said Clare as she pulled into the crowded pub car park in Wellow.

"Hang on a minute, Clare," said Will as she opened the car door. "You're sure you want to do this? It could get unpleasant for both of us."

“I’ve got to. I need to get some material for my article. Tell you what, we’ll give it an hour and then I’ll take you wherever you want to go.”

“Okay.” Reluctantly, Will got out of the car. “I’ll go and get us some drinks. What do you want?”

“Just soda water please.” Clare led the way into the pub and disappeared amongst the crowd.

Will picked up the drinks from the bar. As he turned he recognised the woman next to him. He tried to remember her name; she’d been dating Jim’s son at the time of the strike. Linda; that was it. This was just what he’d dreaded.

“Well, look what’s crawled in!” Will cringed at Linda’s loud, high-pitched voice. “I do believe it’s Will Redman. After all this time. Daring to show ‘is face ‘ere again.”

Linda climbed up onto a stool.

“Listen, everyone. I’ve got something to say,” Linda shouted. The barman obligingly rang the bell to get everyone’s attention.

The room fell silent as Linda pointed her finger at Will. He had a drink in each hand and was surrounded by hostile faces. He felt his colour rising. If this turned nasty he had no means of defending himself.

“This man here is Will Redman. For those of you who are too young to remember, he were a scab, like his dad, Les. Now what we wanna know, mister scab, is what tha’s doing here at Jim’s funeral. Has tha’ no respect?”

A muttering filtered through the crowded room. Someone jostled Will and he spilt some of Clare’s soda water on the shoes of a man in front of him.

“Hey watch it, scab.” The man raised his fist.

“Sorry, mate.” Will muttered. “Can I just get past please?”

“Is tha’ going?” called Linda as Will edged his way past the man. “Good riddance. Let him go, Trev.”

Belatedly Will recognised the man whose shoes he’d soaked. It was Trevor; Jim’s son. As boys he and Trev had been best mates but the strike had changed everything. They’d had a punch-up over it and had avoided each other after that.

Reluctantly the crowd parted to let Will through. As he got outside he placed the drinks on one of the tables, relieved the animosity towards him hadn’t been even worse.

He was thankful it was too cold for most people to want to sit outside – even the smokers. None of his former friends and neighbours had followed him out. He hoped Clare wouldn’t experience the sort of hostility that had been directed at him. It had been a mistake to come here today.

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“Presumably you didn’t let on who you were,” said Will when Clare eventually emerged unscathed from the pub.

“No. They might have twigged if I used my maiden name,” said Clare, pulling her coat tighter to keep out the cold.

“You’re married then?” asked Will.

“Divorced.”

“Children?”

“No.” Clare paused. “You?”

“No to both.” Will stood up. “Can we go now?”

“Sure. Where are we going?” Clare asked as they strode across to the car.

“I’m booked into a hotel in Edwinstowe. The Dukeries Lodge; you know it?”

“I know where it is,” said Clare. “Do they do meals?”

“I hope so. I haven’t had anything since breakfast.”

“In that case, I’ll buy you dinner, on expenses. It’s the least I can do having put you through all that unpleasantness,” said Clare.

“There’s no need. If you just drop me off that’ll be fine.” The last thing Will wanted was more of Clare’s questions.

“No. I insist,” said Clare. “I hate eating on my own.”

She went to the bar to order their food. This had been a favourite venue for Will’s family’s birthday and anniversary celebrations. His happy childhood memories were why he’d decided to book a room at the hotel.

His recollections were interrupted as Clare placed their drinks on the table.

“My turn for a grilling now is it?” he asked.

“I promised you anything you said would be off the record.” She held up her hands. “And I haven’t got my fingers crossed this time.”

“Did you get what you needed at the wake?” asked Will.

Clare took a sip of her drink. “Mostly, although there is something I want to ask you about.”

“What?”

“Who’s Rob Cowell?”

“Why do you want to know about him?” he asked.

“People were talking about him. Someone said they shouldn’t have been so quick to throw you out; that they should have asked you about Rob Cowell.”

“Why would they want to ask me about Rob Cowell?”

"I asked one of the men that," said Clare. "He said Rob left at the same time you did. Until today nobody had heard anything from either of you and you might know where Rob is. Is he a relative of yours?"

"He was Jim's foster son. He were only fourteen. Always seemed a bit lost really – hung about on his own a lot, skipped school, that sort of thing. Had a kind heart though." Will was once again slipping back into the local vernacular as his memories were stirred.

"When did you last see him?"

"The night I left. I were round at Jim's house with Mum and Dad. I'd just told Jim I was going to join the strikers but Dad and Jim were arguing 'cos Dad said he was carrying on working. Rob came in. He were very pleased with himself. He'd stolen some money from one of the managers' houses. Jim were livid. I can remember exactly what he said. 'Tha' stupid little tyke. We mebbe 'ard up but we i'nt thieves.' I could see the hurt on Rob's face. It sickened me. I went home, packed me stuff and left."

"Where did you go?"

"I hitched down to London. Then I met a guy in a pub who said they were looking for miners in Australia. So that's where I went."

"Hence the Aussie accent," Clare commented. "Well, Notts-Aussie! Is this the first time you've been back?"

Will nodded and picked up his glass.

"You going back to Australia?" Clare asked.

"Yep. Sooner the better really. I'd forgotten how cold it gets here."

"Did you come back specially for Jim's funeral?"

"No. I got word that me mum's in a bad way."

"What's wrong with her?" Clare asked.

"Terminal cancer and dementia. She's in a home in Worksop. I've come over to clear out her house. It's got to be sold to pay her care home fees."

"What about your dad?"

"He died some years back."

"And you didn't come to his funeral?"

"I didn't know about it until it were too late."

"How did you know about Jim's funeral?"

"I saw the obituary in this morning's Worksop Guardian. It were a spur of the moment thing."

To Will's relief, their food arrived. He'd told Clare more about himself and his family than he'd ever told anyone else. She'd certainly got a knack of getting him to talk, whether he wanted to or not.

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Clare arrived at Will's hotel just before nine-thirty the next morning. She'd managed to persuade Will to let her drive him to his mother's care home. Her journalistic instincts told her that there was still more of Will's story to be unearthed. Anyway, it was Saturday and she'd not much else planned for her day.

"Tell me about you," said Will as they drove past the outskirts of Sherwood Forest. He was determined not to let Clare delve further into his life history. "How did you become a journalist?"

"I did some work experience at a local paper when I was at school. I loved it. They gave me a job when I finished my A levels."

"Have you worked for any of the national papers?" asked Will.

"Only freelance. I'm doing this story for one of the Sunday papers. That's why I didn't want to miss the chance to talk to people at Jim's wake."

"Can you make a living as a freelance?" asked Will.

"I wish!" Clare laughed cynically. "I also work for a free local magazine based in Sheffield."

"Do you live in Sheffield?"

"No. Worksop. Quite near here." Clare said as she pulled into the care home's car park. "Can I come in with you?" she asked. "It's freezing out here."

Will opened his mouth to object but it was too late, she was already several paces ahead of him.

"I don't know if she'll recognise you," said the manager as she escorted them to Will's mother's room. "She gets a bit confused sometimes." She pushed the door open. "Doreen, you've got some visitors."

"Hello, Mum." Will took his mother's hand as her tired eyes scrutinised his face. "It's Will, Mum. I've come back."

"Will?" The old woman looked perplexed. "Tha's not my Will. Tha's too old. My Will's nobbut a lad."

"It is me, Mum." Will perched on the bed. "I've been away too long. I'm sorry. I should have come back sooner."

Doreen looked past Will. "Who's this?"

"Hello, Mrs Redman. I'm Clare – a friend of Will's".

"Come and sit down, me duck," she said, pointing at a chair by the bed. "I don't bite." Doreen turned back to Will. "Well, lad. Where's tha bin all these years?"

Will gave her a potted history of his time in Australia. Clare listened intently but was disappointed to discover that he seemed to have lived a very uneventful life out there.

“Can I ask you a question, Mrs Redman?” said Clare.

“Of course, dear,” said Doreen.

“What happened to Rob Cowell?”

Doreen gasped. “Who?” The blood seemed to have drained from her face.

The old lady took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

Will looked sharply at Clare.

“Perhaps we’d better go,” he said. “I’ll come back and see you another day, Mum.”

There was no reply from his mother. Thinking she’d fallen asleep, Will and Clare left her room on tiptoe.

Half an hour later, Will collected the keys to Doreen’s house from the estate agent handling the sale. Will said he would take a bus to Ollerton but Clare insisted that she had nothing else to do and would drive him.

Clare’s instincts were on high alert again. Doreen’s reaction to her question about Rob had been interesting. There was a mystery there and Clare was determined to get to the bottom of it.

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“It’s the one with the ‘for sale’ board outside,” said Will as they approached his mother’s house.

“I’ll leave you here for a bit,” said Clare, to Will’s relief. “I’m going to see if I can find Constable Wetherby.”

“Who’s he?”

“He was a local bobby when I lived here. He’ll no doubt have retired by now but he might still be around. And he might give me some quotes for my article.”

As Will stepped back from the car, he was approached by a couple with a dog. Clare looked back as she turned the corner and saw them walking towards Doreen’s house.

She parked her car on the street where she and her parents had lived. There was a pub a few doors away. There might be someone there who knew where Constable Wetherby was living now.

Fewer than half a dozen people were in the bar. Their conversations stopped as she walked in.

“What can I get you?” asked the landlord.

“Soda water please. And whatever you’re having.”

“Thanks.” He started to pour Clare’s drink. “You new in these parts?”

“Not really,” said Clare. “I lived here until I was about ten.” She took a five pound note from her purse. “Maybe you can help me. I was hoping I might find Constable Wetherby.”

“Old Fred Wetherby! He retired years ago. What’s tha’ want him for?”

“I’m a journalist. I’m writing a piece about Ollerton. I was hoping he might be able to clarify a few points for me.”

“Well, lass, tha’ might be in luck. He usually comes in ‘ere on a Saturday.” He took a mouthful of beer. “What’s it to do with then, this thing you’re writing about Ollerton?”

“How things have changed since the pits closed.”

“Huh. Not for the better, that’s for sure.” He looked towards the door as an elderly man came in. “Heyup, Fred. This lass is ‘ere to see thee.”

“Constable Wetherby. How are you?” Clare introduced herself. She used her maiden name this time.

“I remember. You were that little lass what had her pendant stolen when someone broke in to your dad’s house.”

“Yes that’s right.” said Clare. “It was a birthday present.”

“Aye. Whoever took that stole three hundred pounds from your Mum’s kitchen drawer and picked up your pendant on his way out. We never got him. We had a suspect but he disappeared.”

“It wasn’t Rob Cowell by any chance?” suggested Clare.

Fred Wetherby nodded. “Strange business that. Those were bad times. Families at each other’s throats, police being bussed in to try and keep order. And the poverty. Some of the striking families had no fuel, no food, nothing.”

“Let me get you a drink,” said Clare.

They sat at a table near the fire. Two other men were sitting nearby.

“What can you tell me about Rob Cowell?” asked Clare.

“What’s tha wantin’ to know about him for?” It was one of the men at a neighbouring table who spoke.

“Go on, Billy. Tell us what tha’ knows,” said Fred.

“‘E lived at Jim Breedon’s ‘ouse, next door to me. ‘E just disappeared. Same time as Jim’s nephew.”

“Was that Will Redman?” prompted Clare.

“Aye. Some people thought they’d gone together but I dunno. I saw young Will thumbing a lift at the side of the A614. I were going t’other way or I’d have picked him up. But I didn’t see anyone with him.”

“I never knew that,” said Fred. “When we went to question Rob about the burglary, Jim told us Rob had left home and gone with Will. I wonder what did happen to Rob Cowell.”

“Will Redman’s back, Fred,” said Billy. “‘E were at Jim’s funeral yesterday. Mebbe ‘e knows what happened to Rob.”

Clare thanked the men for their help and made her apologies. She needed to go to the supermarket. As she pushed her trolley around Tesco she tried to work out what questions to ask Will. All her instincts were telling her that he knew more about what had happened to Rob Cowell than he was telling.

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As Clare approached Doreen’s house she could see a police car parked outside. The front door of the house opened and Will came out flanked by two uniformed police officers.

“Am I under arrest?” Will asked as they walked along the path.

“Why would you think that, sir?” The officer put his hand on Will’s head and pushed him into the back of the police car.

Clare watched as Will was driven off. A young policewoman was tying police tape between a lamp post and the garden fence to cordon off the area.

“Excuse me. Can you tell me what’s happening please,” Clare called out.

“This is a crime scene. Kindly move on madam,” the policewoman said turning away. Clare walked back to her car.

In the next hour she watched as various police vehicles arrived. A small group of neighbours was gathering outside the taped-off area. She dug a notebook and a pen out of her bag and went across to the little cluster of people.

“What’s going on?” she asked one of the women.

“They’ve just arrested someone in Doreen’s house.”

“Who?” Clare asked.

“Will Redman,” said a man standing next to her. “‘E were at the funeral yesterday. I knew ‘e were a wrong ‘un.”

“Why have they arrested him?” Clare persevered.

“They probably think ‘e ‘ad summat to do wi’ that lad what went missing all them years ago.”

A van pulled up next to them. The policewoman asked the onlookers to move out of the way. As the van doors opened Clare could see forensic equipment stacked in boxes. Two men began putting on plastic coveralls.

Clare had never been so close to a crime scene before. As a journalist she needed to find out as much as she could. She looked across at the houses each side of the cordoned-off area. If she could get one of those two householders to let her in she might get sight of the back of Doreen’s house. She turned to the woman she’d spoken to before.

“Who lives there?” she asked pointing to the nearest house.

“I do,” said the woman. “Why?”

“I’m a reporter,” said Clare. “I need to get a better idea of what’s going on. Any chance you’d let me have a look out of your back bedroom window?”

The woman looked doubtful.

“I’d like to interview you as well. You know, find out about the family.”

The woman’s expression softened.

“Alright then. I’ll do it for Doreen.”

“What’s your name?” asked Clare.

“Debs. Debs Clark.”

Clare introduced herself as she followed the woman into the house.

Upstairs, Clare and Debs edged round the double bed that took up most of the space and looked over into Doreen’s garden. Several police officers were shovelling earth from what appeared to be a neglected vegetable patch onto the lawn.

While they were watching, two men in protective suits erected a tent over the area being dug.

“Never mind, duck.” Debs could see Clare’s disappointment. “Come downstairs and have a cuppa. I’ll tell thee what tha’ needs to know – what I can any road.”

In the kitchen, Debs filled the kettle.

“Were you living here at the time of the ’84 strike?” asked Clare.

“Aye. We moved in when we got married in ’83. Les and Doreen were next door wi’ Will. Les worked through the whole of the strike and there were some around here who never spoke to him again. But Doreen and me, we stayed mates. She’s in a home now though.”

“Did you know Jim Breedon?” asked Clare.

“Aye – Doreen’s brother. He lived three doors along the street. Hang on; didn’t I see you at his funeral yesterday?”

“Yes,” Clare admitted. “Do you remember the night that Will left home?”

“I do because there were a lot of activity in Les and Doreen’s back garden that night. I mentioned it to Doreen at the time and she said Les had been so angry and frustrated about the strike and an argument he’d had wi’ Jim that he went out to dig the vegetable plot to try and calm himself down.”

“Was Will with him?” Clare asked.

“I dunno. There were two men in the garden but I couldn’t see who they were. It were dark. It might have been Will wi’ ‘is dad. I don’t really know. But I never saw Will again after that.”

“What about Rob Cowell?”

“E lived wi’ Jim; had done for several years. He were a nice lad in many ways but always hangin’ around wi’ nowt to do.”

“What happened to him?”

“He left – same time as Will. Jim said Rob had gone wi’ Will. Nobody heard ‘owt from either of ‘em ‘til Will turned up at the funeral . . .” Debs stopped mid-sentence as shouts were heard from Doreen’s garden next door.

The two women quietly stepped out into Debs’ back garden and positioned themselves close to the six-foot high fence.

“Yes sir,” they heard one of the policemen say. “It’s definitely a human skeleton.”

A horrified look appeared on Debs’ face.

“I’ve got to go.” Clare said. “Just quickly though, what can you tell me about Doreen?”

“Doreen’s lovely. Her hubby weren’t striking but that didn’t stop her helpin’ the strikers’ wives where she could. They put on a Christmas party for the kids that year. They were struggling to get enough money together and then a mystery donation suddenly came in: three hundred pounds!”

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At the police station, Will was shown into an interview room. A man wearing civilian clothes followed him in.

“Perhaps you’ll tell me.” Will tried to keep his tone calm and measured. “Am I under arrest?”

“No, sir. You’re here voluntarily to help us with our enquiries,” the man said.

“What enquiries?”

“We’ll get to that shortly, sir. First, though, I need your fingerprints and a sample of your DNA for elimination purposes.”

Will shrugged and let the man do his job. When he’d finished Will asked again:

“What enquiries do I need to be eliminated from?”

“The disappearance of Rob Cowell in 1984.”

“Do I need a solicitor?” Will asked.

“I don’t know. Do you?” As he left the room, the man smirked at Will.

The police seemed in no hurry to question Will. It was almost two hours before the door to the interview room opened and an older man in a dishevelled mis-matching jacket and trousers came in with the detective who’d taken Will’s fingerprints. They sat across the table from Will.

The more senior man switched the recording machine on and stated his name: Detective Chief Inspector John Murray. Then his colleague did the same: Detective Sergeant Pete Lucas. He asked Will to state his name and address for the tape.

“William Redman. I’m currently staying at the Dukeries Lodge hotel in Edwinstowe. Normally I live in Australia.”

“Why have you come to the UK, Mr Redman. Or can I call you Will?” asked the older man.

“My mother is in a care home. I’ve got to sell her house to pay for her care.”

The younger man read out an address in Ollerton. “Is that your mother’s address?”

“Yes.”

“What were you doing there today?”

“I’ve just told you. I went to start sorting things out ready to sell the house.”

“Talk us through what happened at the house before our officers brought you here today.”

“I’d just got to the house when a couple arrived asking if they could look round. They hadn’t got an appointment or anything. They’d got a dog with them that had been rolling about in some muck in the fields. They put it in the back garden while I showed them round. They said they’d contact the estate agent if they wanted to make an offer. That’s about it really.”

“Why were you digging in the back garden?”

“I wasn’t. The dog had been digging in the vegetable patch. It had made a right mess! I was shovelling the earth back off the path, trying to tidy it up.”

“When was the last time you saw Rob Cowell?” It was the older man who asked the question this time.

“It was 1984, at my Uncle Jim’s house – Jim Breedon. He were Rob’s foster father. Jim and my dad had a big row and then Rob came in and Jim started on him. I’d had enough. I walked out, packed a few things and went. Never saw any of them again.”

“Was that the last time you were in the UK, Will?” DCI Murray asked.

“Yes.”

“You see that’s what I’m finding difficult to understand. In thirty-two years you’ve never once been back to see your mother and father. Why’s that?”

Will shrugged. “I don’t know really. When I left, things were very unpleasant. I had no great desire to come back.”

“We’ve been told you were at Jim Breedon’s funeral yesterday, Will.” The younger man took up the questioning again.

“Yes. I was.”

“I understand Jim’s family weren’t best pleased to see you. Why might that have been?”

“We were on opposite sides in the strike. They’ve never forgiven that.”

There was a knock at the door. The older man stepped outside.

DS Lucas switched off the tape, sat back and folded his arms.

Will began to feel uncomfortable under the man's stare but he was determined not to be the one to break the silence.

"We'll find out, you know." DS Lucas said. "Sooner or later." He looked away as the door opened and DCI Murray beckoned to him. As they left the room, a uniformed officer entered and stood by the door.

"Stand up, please, Mr Redman," DS Lucas instructed as he and DCI Murray entered the room. Will glanced at his watch. He'd now been at the police station for over four hours.

Will did as he was told.

"William Redman, I am arresting you . . ."

Will was so shocked he couldn't take in any of the other words the police officer was saying. He was led to the custody suite and ordered to hand over his watch, empty his pockets and remove his belt. He'd never felt so humiliated in his life.

The police agreed to contact Clare to let her know that Will had been arrested. They kept him in a cell for what seemed like several hours before leading him back to the interview room. A duty solicitor was waiting there for him. She introduced herself as Lucy Firman. After a brief discussion, Lucy went to the door to tell the police officer outside that Will was ready to be interviewed.

As the police officers switched on the recording machine and went through the procedures necessary to identify everyone present, Will tried hard to pull himself out of the dazed stupor he felt himself sinking into.

"Do you recognise this, Will?" DCI Murray asked, pushing a clear plastic bag across the table which contained a small jewellery box. Smears of mud had soiled the polythene.

"I don't think so. Why?"

"What about this?" A second plastic bag was pushed across the table towards Will.

"I, er . . ." he looked at his solicitor.

"It's a simple enough question, Will." DCI Murray's tone was impatient. "Do you recognise it or not?"

"It looks like a necklace or a pendant," said Will.

"Have you seen it before?"

"No," said Will.

"Then why are your fingerprints on these items?" DCI Murray sat back in his chair.

Will closed his eyes as suddenly every detail of the last time he'd seen Rob came back to him.

"Rob showed me a necklace. I'd forgotten about it – it was only for a couple of seconds. He'd stolen it along with some money. A few hundred pounds, I think. He thought he'd done good,

getting some money and a nice bit of jewellery that could be sold. His family were very hard up – they'd been on strike for near on a year."

"Tell me again why you were digging in your mother's back garden, Will." The younger detective was speaking now. "Was it to remove anything that might implicate you in Rob Cowell's death before the house is sold?"

Will turned to his solicitor. This was starting to look very bad for him.

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The police held Will in custody for twenty-four hours. They reluctantly let him go when his solicitor pointed out that they had nothing other than circumstantial evidence – and not very much of that. It was hardly surprising that Will wouldn't recognise a necklace he'd held for just a few seconds thirty-two years ago. And what would have been Will's motive in killing Rob?

Clare was waiting for him outside the police station.

"I feel really embarrassed about accepting so many favours from you," said Will, relieved to see her.

"Don't be daft. And anyway, I'm hoping I might get a juicy story out of this." She grinned at him. She was only half joking.

"Tell me what happened," Clare said as they drove back to her house in Worksop.

"Apparently a neighbour of Mum's phoned the police when he looked out of his back bedroom window and thought he saw me digging up the garden. He'd been at Jim's wake and recognised me. Someone else who was at the wake had already told the police that I was back and it seems they'd been wanting to ask me about Rob's disappearance ever since 1984. On the basis of what the neighbour said, they dug down in the garden themselves and found something."

"A skeleton?" Clare prompted. "It's been on the local news." She didn't tell Will that she'd been the one who'd given them the story.

"They seem to think it's Rob and that I'd gone there to move the body before selling the house," Will continued. "Oh, and they also found a necklace."

"What sort of necklace?"

"A pendant. It had, like, two commas wrapped round each other."

"Yin and yang," murmured Clare. "I had one like that."

"Really?"

"I got it for my tenth birthday. It was stolen along with some money from our house. Perhaps I ought to tell the police. They don't take kindly to people withholding information," said Clare.

\*

On Monday morning, Clare went into work. Will caught the bus to Worksop to see Doreen again. He was determined to get back to Australia as quickly as he could and wanted to spend as much time as possible with his mother before he went.

Doreen's delight at seeing Will didn't last long. Within half an hour of his arrival, the manager showed DCI Murray and DS Lucas into his mother's room.

"These gentlemen are policemen, Doreen," she said.

Doreen's eyes filled with tears.

"Ave you come for me?" she asked.

The two detectives looked at each other with surprise.

"I don't know Mrs Redman. Should we have?"

"It were me that did it."

"Did what, Mrs Redman?"

"I'm not saying."

The more senior of the two officers looked across at Will. "Could we speak outside for a moment please, Mr Redman?"

"We've just come to ask your mother if she can tell us what happened on the day Rob Cowell disappeared and what she knows about the money and the pendant. We don't want to cause her any distress. Is there anyone else we could talk to?"

"No. I've told you all I know. The only other people there were my dad and Jim Breedon, Mum's brother. They're both dead now."

"I see. Forgive me for asking, but is your mother, er, compus mentis?"

"She's very confused, I'm afraid. And she's very ill. I hope you're not going to question her in the same manner you questioned me."

The two police officers walked away and conferred together out of Will's hearing.

"We're quite happy for you to sit in while we talk to your mother, Mr Redman, if that would make it easier for her."

It was as Will feared. Even with him present, Doreen very quickly became distressed and the manager of the home insisted that the police desist from their questioning of her.

Later, at Clare's house with a takeaway curry and a bottle of wine, Will recounted the conversation to her.

"They asked Mum what happened when Rob came in that night. She said she couldn't remember him being there. Then she started saying Jim wasn't there either."

“But wouldn’t you think she’d remember something like that? You said it was a furious row and most of the people you talk to about those times can remember just about everything that happened back then.”

“She says she doesn’t remember.” Will shrugged.

His mobile phone rang.

“Yes.” He paused to listen. “Right. Yes. I’ll come straight away.” He ended the call. “Mum’s had a stroke. She’s in a bad way.”

“Come on. I’ll take you in the car.”

Seeing his mother lying against the pillows made Will regret the years he’d been away. The police were right to be critical of him; he hadn’t been a good son and now it was too late to make things right. He sat down and took her hand.

“It’s me, Mum. Will. I’m here now.”

Doreen’s lips moved but he couldn’t tell what she said. He bent his head closer.

“ . . . Priest,” was all he could make out.

He ran out to the car where Clare was waiting for him. “She wants a priest,” he said to her.

“I’ll get one.”

“What do you want to confess, Mum?” Will said as he sat down by her bed again. “Can you tell me?”

Doreen opened her eyes and stared directly at her son. There was no recognition there.

“It were me. I put the bag on his head to catch the blood. He couldn’t breathe. I’m sorry. Jim hit Rob but it were me that killed him.”

“No, Mum. Don’t say that. You didn’t. It were an accident. Rob fell and hit his head on the table when Jim punched him. That’s what killed him.”

“No. When they picked him up to carry him outside, I heard him moan. He were still alive then.”

“No, Mum. That would just be air escaping from his throat. He were already dead.” Will was sure he’d read somewhere that such a thing could happen and his Mum mustn’t go to her grave thinking she’d killed Rob.

His mother fell back against the pillows, still holding Will’s hand.

“Will. I’ve brought Father Michael.” Clare and a priest were standing in the doorway.

Will hadn’t realised there was anyone else in the room. He wondered how long they’d been there.

“Thank you for coming, Father.” Will got up to greet the priest. “She thinks she killed someone called Rob. She didn’t. Please do what you can to comfort her.”

Will and Clare waited outside whilst the priest was with Doreen.

“How much did you hear?” Will asked Clare.

Clare drove Will back to his hotel in Edwinstowe.

“How can you be so sure that the blow to Rob’s head was what killed him?” she asked.

Will hesitated momentarily.

“The police told me.”

“But your mother seemed to think otherwise. And she was there.”

Will said nothing.

“Oh well. Just a thought.” Clare shrugged. “I’m off home. I’ll call you in the morning.”

\*

After a sleepless night Will decided it was the turn of the police to answer his questions. DCI Murray and DS Lucas were already busy when he got to the police station and he knew he could have a long wait. So be it. He couldn’t have his mother going to her grave convinced that she’d been the one who’d killed Rob.

There was only one thing on his mind. What had killed Rob that day?

“Thank you for coming in, Clare.” It was DS Lucas’s voice. Will turned to see him shaking hands with Clare.

“Clare? What are you doing here?” he asked.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr Redman,” DS Lucas interrupted. “We’ll be with you in a few minutes.”

Clare sat down next to Will.

“They asked me to come in and have a look at the pendant – to see if it was mine. It was. I’ve just been giving them a statement. Why are you here?”

“I want to get to the bottom of what killed Rob. I can’t stop thinking about what Mum said about the plastic bag.”

As Clare left to go to work, DS Lucas came to escort Will to the same interview room he’d been in before.

“I need to know what caused Rob’s death,” Will said, as assertively as he could.

“According to the pathologist it was a head wound.” DCI Murray paused. “Why?”

Will ignored the question.

“How can you be so certain when there’s only a skeleton for the pathologist to examine? What if it had been something else, like suffocation?”

“What makes you think he might have been suffocated, Will?” asked DS Lucas.

“Or stabbed, or poisoned, or drowned,” Will said quickly, realising his error. “For example.”

The two detectives looked steadily at him.

“How can you even be sure it’s Rob?” Will asked.

“Dental records,” said DCI Murray. He stood up. “Excuse us a minute, Will.” He and DS Lucas left the room.

Will began to wish he’d left things as they were. His instinct was to get back to Australia on the first available plane. But he certainly couldn’t let his mother take the blame for Rob’s death. When the two detectives returned to the room and sat down, DCI Murray was carrying a folder. He opened it and took out a couple of sheets of paper.

“I hope you’ve got a strong stomach, Will,” he said, pushing one of the pages towards him. It was a photo of a partially skeletonised head, showing the location and dimensions of an injury. He gave Will chance to study the image and then pushed a second page across the table.

“Read that,” he said, pointing to a paragraph near the end of the page.

Will found the technical terminology difficult to understand but the final sentence was clear enough. ‘Death would have been instantaneous.’

“Does that answer your question, Will?” asked DCI Murray.

Will nodded. He started to get up but DCI Murray continued.

“There was a plastic bag tied over the head. We think whoever moved the body perhaps did that so they wouldn’t get covered in blood. But the pathologist says it was the blow to the head that killed Rob. No doubt about it. It seems Rob had an unusually thin skull.”

“It’s a shame your mother can’t remember who was there that night,” said DS Lucas, fixing Will with an accusatory look.

\*

Clare phoned Will as soon as she got home that evening.

“Everything OK?” she asked.

“The post mortem report says Rob died as a result of a head injury.”

“So your Mum’s in the clear then?”

“Yes.”

“What now?” asked Clare.

“I’m coming over to Worksop to tell her.”

“Come and have a meal with me after.”

"Thanks," said Will. "I'll bring some wine."

His mother was asleep when he arrived. He sat holding her hand, reflecting on the agonies she must have gone through, believing she'd killed Rob.

As she opened her eyes, a tear ran down her cheek. He passed her a tissue from the box by the bed.

"I'm sorry, Will."

"You've nothing to be sorry about, Mum. Rob died when his head hit the table. The police are quite clear about that. I've seen the pathologist's report."

"But we were there. If we'd called an ambulance, Rob might have lived."

"No, Mum. The report said he had an unusually thin skull. He died as soon as he hit his head."

Doreen smiled at him and closed her eyes.

It was half an hour before Will realised she'd stopped breathing.

"What are you going to do now?" Clare asked as she washed up the dishes.

Will took a soapy plate from her and wiped it on a tea towel.

"I'm going to move into Mum's house until it's sold."

"You're not going back to Australia then?"

"Not for a bit anyway."

"What I can't understand," said Clare, "is why Rob was buried in your parents' garden when the row took place at Jim's house."

Will felt himself go cold. He'd been right about Clare's journalistic instincts.

"Jim's back yard had been concreted over."

"So Jim and Les carried Rob's body along the street?"

"No. All those houses back onto a field. They went that way."

"You were there when it happened?" Clare sounded incredulous. "Tell me about it."

Will finally relented. There was no other way to stop Clare's questions.

"Rob came in and threw the cash onto the coffee table," he began. "He handed me a small blue box."

\*

*"Open it," Rob said as Will hesitated.*

*Will lifted a silver pendant out of the box.*

*"Where'd you get this?" he asked, thrusting the necklace and box back at Rob.*

*"Same place as the dosh. Good, 'eh?"*

*Will looked across at his uncle. Jim had a reputation for being very free with his fists.*

*Jim pushed past Will. 'Tha' stupid little tyke. We mebbe 'ard up but we i'nt thieves.' He punched Rob's chin hard and Rob fell backwards, hitting his head on the coffee table.*

*"No!" Will was already at Rob's side. Blood was trickling from a wound on the back of Rob's head. Will felt Rob's wrist for a pulse.*

*"Let me see." Les Redman bent down, his cheek against Rob's lips.*

*"What have you done, Jim?" Doreen wailed. "How could you do that to the lad?"*

*"He's dead, Jim," said Les, his face ashen.*

*"I'll call an ambulance," said Will. "I expect the police will come as well."*

*"No." Jim snatched the phone from Will's hand. "It were an accident."*

*"It were no accident. You killed him," said Doreen.*

*"With my record, I'll be sent down for years," pleaded Jim. "That's not going to bring him back. And the publicity will do no end of harm."*

*"I agree," said Les. "Let's just bury him. Best to say nowt about it."*

*"We can't do it 'ere. If we dig up the concrete it'll make a right racket."*

*"You're right, Jim. We'll put him in the veg patch at our house." Les looked again at the wound on Rob's head. "Best get summat to catch the blood, Doreen."*

\*

*"So that's when I tied the bag round his head," said Will. "Jim and Dad carried Rob along the edge of the field and buried him in Dad's vegetable patch. When I saw that dog digging there on Saturday I knew we'd be found out."*

*Clare's face was impassive.*

*"Are you shocked?" Will asked her.*

*"Yes. I suppose I am," she said.*

*"Dad was certain Rob were dead as soon as he'd hit his head. Neither of us could feel a pulse. But, if he were still alive when I tied that plastic bag over his head, it would have been me that killed him," said Will. "I've spent the last thirty-two years trying to justify to myself not making that phone call, but I've never been able to. I should have gone ahead and told the police."*

“You were only a lad,” said Clare. “And with your dad and your uncle against you it would have been a difficult thing to do.”

“I mean I should have told them today, when I was at the police station.”

“What good would that do?” asked Clare. “The man responsible for Rob’s death is dead. So is your dad and now your mum. The police would probably charge you with something like failing to report a death or perverting the course of justice and then you’d be the one sent to jail.”

“Maybe that’s what I deserve.”

“That’s what Jim deserved,” said Clare. “But not you. You weren’t to blame.”

But Will knew the guilt would punish him for the rest of his life unless he atoned for what he did.

First thing in the morning, he’d go and see DCI Murray. It was time to lay the past to rest.

END